

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 10772

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, TH

SUBJ: LOCAL RESISTENCE TO BANGKOK'S BANDIT POLICIES

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION BANGKOK FM SONGKHLA JUNE 6 RPTD
FOR YOUR INFO:

SONGKHLA 089

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, TH

SUBJ: LOCAL RESISTENCE TO BANGKOK'S BANDIT POLICIES

REF: A) SONGKHLA 052

B) SONGKHLA 060

C) SONGKHLA 063

SUMMARY: RECENT EVENTS SUGGEST THAT THE MINISTRY OF
INTERIOR IS TAKING A BOLDER HAND IN INTERNAL SECURITY
POLICIES FOR SOUTH THAILAND. THE FIRST STEP WAS ENGINEERING
THE SURRENDER OF BANDIT LEADER PHO SU. THEN CAME A
RESHUFFLE OF POLICE PERSONNEL IN THE THREE PREDOMINATELY
MALAY-MUSLIM PROVINCES. LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE WORRIED
ABOUT THE MINISTRY'S POLICY INITIATIVES AND MAY HAVE
CONNIVED IN RECENT TEACHER AND MERCHANT DEMONSTRATIONS.
SHOWING A STRONG HAND, THE MINISTRY RECENTLY LAUNCHED
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A POLICE OPERATION AGAINST THE BANDITS; THE ARMY STANDS

ASIDE. END SUMMARY.

I. THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR EXTENDS ITSELF

1. THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (MOI), AND MORE SPECIFICALLY DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER BUNLOET LOETPRICHA, APPEARS EMBARKED ON A COURSE TO TAKE THE LEAD IN SECURITY POLICIES TOWARD THE PREDOMINATELY MALAY/MUSLIM PROVINCES OF YALA, PATTANI AND NARATHIWAT. THE FIRST MOVE TO INCREASE MOI'S INFLUENCE WAS THE USE OF THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN BUNLOET AND BANDIT LEADER PHO SU WAMAEDISA TO AFFECT PHO SU'S SURRENDER (REF A). ALTHOUGH CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY PRECEDED THE NEGOTIATIONS, FEW CIVILIAN OFFICIALS WERE BRIEFED ON BANGKOK'S INTENTIONS. LIEUTENANT GENERAL SAN CHITPATIMA, COMMANDER OF THE FOURTH ARMY AND THE MAN PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY POLICIES IN SOUTH THAILAND, WAS NOT CONSULTED DURING THE FORMATIVE STAGES OF THE SURRENDER DECISION. THE RESULT WAS THAT FEW OFFICIALS WE TALKED TO AT THE TIME THOUGHT THE APPROACH WAS SERIOUS, OR WOULD WORK (REF B).

2. LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER PHO SU SURRENDERED BANGKOK ANNOUNCED A SERIES OF TRANSFERS AMONG HIGH RANKING POLICE OFFICERS IN THE BANDIT AFFECTED. BANGKOK'S MOVE, HOWEVER, INCREASED SUSPICIONS BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES, MAINLY POLICE, AND BANGKOK OVER THE WISDOM OF BANGKOK'S CONCILIATORY POLICIES (REF B). IN DEFENSE, THE POLICE APPEAR TO HAVE ENACTED A WORK SLOWDOWN AND ENCOURAGED "POPULAR" DEMONSTRATIONS IN FAVOR OF SPECIFIC POLICE OFFICERS, SUCH AS PATTANI PROVINCIAL POLICE CHIEF, POL. COLONEL RATCHASAK CHANTHARAT, AND SAIBURI DISTRICT POLICE CHIEF, POL. CAPTAIN SANPHET THAMMAKUN.

3. THE POLICE VIEW THE TRANSFERS AS BANGKOK'S TURNING AWAY FROM THEM AND ACCEPTANCE OF ADVICE FROM THEIR ENEMY, PHO SU. POL. COLONEL RATCHASAK, IN PARTICULAR, HAS A PUBLIC IMAGE AS AN IMPLACABLE FOE OF THE BANDITS, ALTHOUGH HIS TRACK RECORD DOESN'T NECESSARILY SUPPORT THIS CONTENTION. CIVILIAN OFFICIALS ARE CONCERNED AT PHO SU'S RECENT REMARKS CALLING FOR THE RETURN OF YALA PROVINCE'S MOBILE DEVELOPMENT
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UNIT LEADER, COLONEL THANOM WAITHANOMSAT. LIEUTENANT GENERAL SAN BOUNCHED THANOM AND HIS BROTHER, THE YALA DEPUTY GOVERNOR, OUT OF THE SOUTH FOR TRAFFICKING WITH THE SEPARATISTS IN M-16'S. (SEE SONGKHLA 011 OF 20 AUGUST 1974). CORRUPT OFFICIALS AFRAID PHO SU WILL FINGER THEM OR HONEST OFFICIALS FEARFUL THAT PHO SU'S ADVICE WILL SADDLE THEM WITH CORRUPT OFFICIALS ARE BOTH CONCERNED AT THE INTIMACY BETWEEN BUNLOET AND PHO SU.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT PHO SU LEFT YALA FOR BANGKOK
THE WEEK THE TRANSFERS WERE ANNOUNCED.

4. GOVERNOR SA-NE WATTANATHON RECENTLY PROVIDED A DIFFERENT
INSIGHT INTO WHAT IS BECOMING A CLEAVAGE BETWEEN BANGKOK
AND OFFICIALS IN THE THREE SOUTHERN PROVINCES. DURING
A JUNE 3 CONVERSATION HE POSITED THAT THAI BUREAUCRATS
TEND TO BE CAUTIOUS UNLESS GIVEN SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS.
IN A PERIOD OF CHANGE THIS MEANS HALF-HEARTED GOVERN-
MENT. BANGKOK IS PRESENTLY MAKING POLICY WITHOUT CONSULTING
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS. THE ARRANGEMENT OF PHO SU'S
SURRENDER FALLS INTO THIS CATEGORY, HE SAID. FURTHERMORE,
PHO SU IS SUPPOSEDLY CONFINED TO RAMAN DISTRICT IN YALA,
BUT SOMEONE ARRANGED HIS RECENT TRIP TO BANGKOK WITHOUT
INFORMING GOVERNOR SA-NE. THUS THE LOCAL SECURITY
FORCES FACE A DILEMMA, SAID THE GOVERNOR, BECAUSE THE
BANDIT BEING CHASED TODAY MAY FALL UNDER SOME BANGKOK
POLITICIAN'S PROTECTION TOMORROW. THUS THE POLICE'S
RECENT LACK OF AGGRESSIVENESS AGAINST THE BANDITS

II. THE DEMONSTRATIONS

5. THE POLICE SLOWDOWN COUPLED WITH THE REMOVAL
OF SPECIAL POLICE SPECIAL ACTION FORCE (SAF) UNITS AND
ARMY UNITS CONTRIBUTED TO A SHARP INCREASE IN BANDIT
ACTIVITY. AT ONE POINT BANDITS STOPPED CARS ON THE
MAIN PATTANI-SAIBURI ROAD IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.

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6. IN NARATHIWAT A NUMBER OF TEACHERS FOUND THEMSELVES KIDNAP VICTIMS. THE TEACHERS IN THAT PROVINCE HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATING FOR FOUR DAYS.

7. TWO PATTANI PORK MERCHANTS WERE KIDNAPPED THE PROVERBIAL STONE'S THROW FROM A POLICE STATION IN DOWNTOWN PATTANI. THE ATTACK ON PORK MERCHANTS STIMULATED THE ENTIRE TOWN TO ACTION. DURING A VISIT ON JUNE 3 WE NOTED THAT NOT ONE SHOP WAS OPEN. A PEOPLES' AND MERCHANTS' DEMONSTRATION PARKED IN FRONT OF THE PROVINCIAL OFFICES WAS ATTACKING THAT FORTRESS OF BANGKOK'S PROVINCIAL PRESENCE WITH ALL THE FORCE ONE LOUDSPEAKER CAN MUSTER.

8. THE PRESENT DEMONSTRATIONS, PARTICULARLY BY THE TEACHERS, ARE REMINISCENT OF THOSE IN DECEMBER 1974 (SEE SONGKHLA 047 OF 17 DECEMBER 1974) AND ARE RESPONSES TO LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES IN BOTH DECEMBER AND NOW, HOWEVER, RANKING POLICE OFFICERS ENCOURAGED THE DEMONSTRATORS.

III. BANGKOK MUSTERS A SUPPRESSION OPERATION

9. AT THE TIME OF PHO SU'S SURRENDER BUNLOET OFFERED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD USE FORCE AGAINST RECALCITRANT BANDITS. BY LATE MAY THE INCREASE IN BANDIT ACTIVITY CAUSED THE REGION NINE COMMANDS OF THE BORDER PATROL AND PROVINCIAL POLICE TO PLAN A SHOW OF FORCE TO DAMPEN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SITUATION, A SITUATION WHICH THE PROVINCE LEVEL POLICE HAD NOT RESPONDED TO. A SMALL FORCE OF 200 POLICE KICKED OFF A CAMPAIGN AT THE FOOT OF BUDO MOUNTAIN, A MAJOR BANDIT SANCTUARY, ON JUNE 3. THERE IS NO INDICATION HOW LONG THE POLICE CAN SUSTAIN THIS OPERATION. DEPUTY PROVINCIAL POLICE COMMISSIONER MAJOR GENERAL PHONGSAK PRANUTNORAPHAN IS QUOTED IN THE PRESS JUNE 3 AS SAYING THAT THE POLICE HAVE 800 NEW RECRUITS TO PUT INTO THE SOUTHERN OPERATION. OUR EVALUATION, IF THIS IS TRUE, IS THAT SUCH A FORCE DOES NOT HAVE THE TRAINING AND SOPHISTICATION TO HANDLE THE SITUATION, LET ALONE THE ETHNIC BACKGROUND TO WIN THE MALAY/MUSLIM PEOPLES' RESPECT.

10. LIEUTENANT GENERAL SAN CHITPATIMA SAID JUNE 5 THAT HE ASSUMED, THE POLICE DESIGNED OPERATION WOULD FAIL. HE SAID THAT THE PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THEY WERE DOING, AND PREDICTED THAT AT SOME POINT HE WOULD BE CALLED IN TO TAKE CHARGE. IN THE MEANTIME SAN IS ADAMENT THAT HE WILL KEEP HIS FORCES OUT OF THE THREE PROVINCES. (COMMENT: IN 1974 SAN RAN A FAIRLY SUCCESSFUL ANTI-BANDIT CAMPAIGN, BUT BACKED OFF AFTER THE NEW PARLIAMENT

CONVENED. HIS REASONING WAS THAT HE HAD NO PROTECTION AGAINST MUSLIM POLITICIANS. AT ONE TIME HE EVEN ASKED ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL KRIT NOT TO REAPPOINT HIM TO A TITLE WHICH GAVE HIM RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MALAY/MUSLIM PROVINCES. SAN'S RETICENCE PROBABLY GAVE MOI AND BUNLOET THE CHANCE TO MOVE INTO THE POLICY VACUUM.)

IV. COMMENTS

11. THIS WHOLE SERIES OF EVENTS ILLUSTRATES THE PROCESS OF PUBLICLY ELECTED OFFICIALS MEDDLING THEIR WAY INTO THE HIGHLY BUREAUCRATIZED THAI DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND TAKING POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION. THE POLITICIANS' RESOURCES, PARTICULARLY RESPECT FROM THE BUREAUCRATS, HOWEVER, ARE FRAGILE.

12. THE RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS, THOUGH ESPOUSING SOME GOOD POINTS, ARE PART OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESISTENCE TO BANGKOK. SOME OF THIS RESISTENCE IS DUE TO CYNICAL SELF PRESERVATION, PERSONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC. SOME IS CONFIDENTIAL

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DUE TO THE INADEQUATE POLICY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CENTER AND THE PROVINCES.

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